

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as shown below, in which insertions are indicated by underlining, and deletions are indicated by strikethrough or by double brackets. This listing of the claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently Amended) A welding method for welding a motorcycle fuel tank, using a plurality of opening/closing mechanisms having one or more attachments, for bringing the attachments into and out of abutting engagement with the fuel tank, comprising the steps of:

bringing the attachments into abutting engagement with the fuel tank by operating said opening/closing mechanisms, thereby holding said fuel tank; and

sequentially bringing the attachments out of abutting engagement with the fuel tank by operating said opening/closing mechanisms, in an order in which the attachments are approached by a welded spot where the fuel tank is welded, as said welded spot moves along a welding line.

2. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein said attachments hold said fuel tank through resilient bodies.

3. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein said fuel tank comprises:

an outer side panel having inwardly extended ends; and

an inner side panel welded to said outer side panel,

wherein said attachments hold said fuel tank while outer surfaces of the ends of said outer side panel and inner surfaces of ends of said inner side panel are superposed, or while the ends of said outer side panel and the ends of said inner side panel are in abutment against each other.

4. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein said attachments are brought out of abutting engagement with said fuel tank by said opening/closing mechanisms, when said welded spot reaches a point spaced 20 mm or less from a reference point on said welding line, which is closest to an abutment point where each of said attachments and said fuel tank abut against each other.

5-12. (Canceled)

13. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein when a relative position of said welded spot with respect to each of said attachments satisfies a predetermined standard, then a corresponding one of said opening/closing mechanisms is operated to bring said attachment out of abutting engagement with said fuel tank.

14. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein said fuel tank is a seamless fuel tank.

15. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein said attachments are mounted on respective arms associated with said opening/closing mechanisms; and when said arms are fully opened, said arms are opened wide enough to allow said fuel tank to be attached and detached, and when said arms are fully closed, said arms are positioned by respective stoppers to hold said fuel tank with said attachments.

16. (Previously presented) A welding method according to claim 1, wherein said attachments are provided in a jig for supporting an outer side panel of said fuel tank; and
said method includes the further step of inserting a positioning mechanism in a fuel inlet defined in an upper surface of said fuel tank, and contacting an inner portion of said fuel tank with the positioning mechanism to hold said fuel tank.

17-20. (Canceled)

21. (New) A method of forming a motorcycle fuel tank from an outer side panel, having an inwardly extended inner end, and an inner side panel having an outwardly extended outer end, said method comprising the steps of:

bringing a plurality of opening/closing mechanisms having a plurality of attachments thereon into abutting engagement with said outer side panel to hold said outer side panel, wherein each of said attachments comprises a resilient member;

inserting a positioning mechanism in an opening defined in a surface of said inner side panel, and contacting said inner side panel with the positioning mechanism to hold said inner side panel against said outer side panel such that the inner end of said outer side panel and the outer end of said inner side panel are aligned with one another to define an interface;

using an automated welding machine, welding the inner end of said outer side panel to the outer end of said inner side panel at a welded spot to form a fuel tank, and moving said welded spot along the interface between said inner and outer side panels while monitoring a present position of said welded spot;

determining the present position of said welded spot in relation to respective positions of

said attachments, and

when a relative position of said welded spot with respect to a position of an individual one of said attachments satisfies a predetermined standard, controlling a corresponding one of said opening/closing mechanisms to bring said individual one of said attachments out of abutting engagement with said fuel tank.

22. (New) A welding method according to claim 21, wherein said attachments are mounted on respective arms associated with said opening/closing mechanisms; and

when said arms are fully opened, said arms are opened wide enough to allow said fuel tank to be attached and detached, and when said arms are fully closed, said arms are positioned by respective stoppers to hold said fuel tank with said attachments.